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ABSTRACT

Undertaken by a student from Rutger's University Graduate School of Library Service, this study is an analysis of the first 500 rejections received in response to his applications for professional library positions over a two year period. Job applications are categorized as solicited and unsolicited: these categories are further divided by type of library and important characteristics of responses received from each. A breakdown of the data is displayed on graphs, including (1) percentage of total applications sent to each type of library; (2) percentage of total solicited positions; (3) percentage of total responses from each type of library; and (4) analysis and percertage of types of rejections received. (MBR)

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THE FIRST FIVE HUNDRED

by

Robert Machalow

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THE FIRST FIVE HUNDRED

No, this is not a history of the first 500 libraries in the world or even the United States. Nor is it a projection of the first 500 years of the American Library Association. Rather it is an accounting and analysis of the first 500 rejections I have received for professional positions in the past two years, from the time I was approaching graduation from Rutger's University's Graduate School of Library Service to the present day. It is my hope that this study will aid those individuals seeking professional positions by preparing them for what is possibly to come, and also to provide a comparative guide to employers.

It could be asked how 500 rejections could possibly be accumulated in just two years, or even where one can find that many positions to apply for. Let me hasten to say that 184 (37%) were unsolicited applications, for I began my quest for professional employment with the 'blanket' technique, in which one simply contacts the directors of various libraries asking for a position, though no position has been advertised. The remaining 316 (63%) were advertised openings for which the minimum advertised qualifications were met.

The term 'rejection,'as it is used in this study, ranges from those positions for which a letter was received stating that the 'addressee' was no longer being considered for the advertised opening, to a lack of any sort of response after a reasonable amount of time (usually six months). It also includes the many shades between, such as letters of acknowledgement which state that 'if we are not in contact with you again within the next three weeks, you can assume' that the position has been filled.

A casual study of the rejections reveals that 64% (320) of the total were from academic, 21% (105) public and 15% (75) special libraries. Seventy-three percent of the academic library rejections were from libraries who had advertised positions, while 27% were from unsolicited academic library applications. Eighty percent of the total number of academic libraries contacted responded while 20% did not. Looking at these figures from a different perspective, we see that 83% of the advertising academic libraries responded while 71% of the unsolicited applications to academic libraries received responses.

Forty-five percent of the public, and 49% of the special library rejections were for advertised positions. The remainder of these figures for this general look are similar to those for

academic libraries: 83% of the public and 68% of the special libraries responded. Of the advertised positions, 73% of the public and 76% of the special libraries sent notification of rejection; 88% of the public and 60% of the special unsolicited applications received responses.

The study of the responses actually received is both more revealing and more practical than those not. On reviewing these five characteristics of importance were noted:

1. Personal letter
2. Apologies
3. Number of applications received
4. Individual who was appointed
5. Resume on file

The first characteristic of note (personal letter) actually records whether or not the rejection letter seemed to have been individually typed. This may not seem important to some, but it makes an applicant feel that the library's personnel committee actually seriously considered the submitted application. Though answering with personal seeming letters is not usually convenient, employers should perhaps consider their own reactions if confronted be a photoreproduced form letter of application.

The second characteristic (apologies) refers primarily to an apology for the use of a form letter or for a delay in notification. A number of responses from unsoliciting libraries apologised for not having any available positions and/or for the tight job market. Many librarians (or personnel department heads) decided that the number of applications received for a particular position was significant, usually mentioned as a justification for the apology. Also of interest to many librarians was which individual had been appointed to the applied for position, or what the person's qualifications were. This is particularly useful though at times disconcerting information.

Of the libraries which sent out rejections, 55% gave the impression of being personal (as defined above). Breaking this down by type of library: advertised academic 36%, public 47%, special 42%; unsolicited academic 76%, public 92%, special 77%. Logically it is easier for an unsoliciting library to respond with a single personal letter than for an advertising library to when deluged by applications.

Apologies were most prevalent from libraries which had not advertised positions. Of the total, 20% of the responding libraries apologised for something. The statistics for the advertised positions: 19% academic, 17% public and 0% special. For the unsolicited applications: 29% academic, 22% public and 33% special.

The next two characteristics, the number of applications received and the individual who was appointed, are not relevant to the unsolicited applications. Fourteen percent of the rejections for advertised positions mentioned the number of applications received; only 5% made mention of the individual who had been selected. In both these characteristics, academic libraries took the greatest pains to disseminate the information: 18% of the academic, as opposed to 9% of the public and 0% of the special libraries mentioned the number of applications; 7% of the academic, 0% of the public and 3% of the special libraries mentioned the individual and/or the qualifications of the individual selected.

A substantial number of libraries stated that the submitted resume would be kept on file, most particularly the unsolicited. Let me hasten to note that this is one purpose of the unsolicited application. On the other hand, keeping a resume on file as a response to an application for a specific position implies the

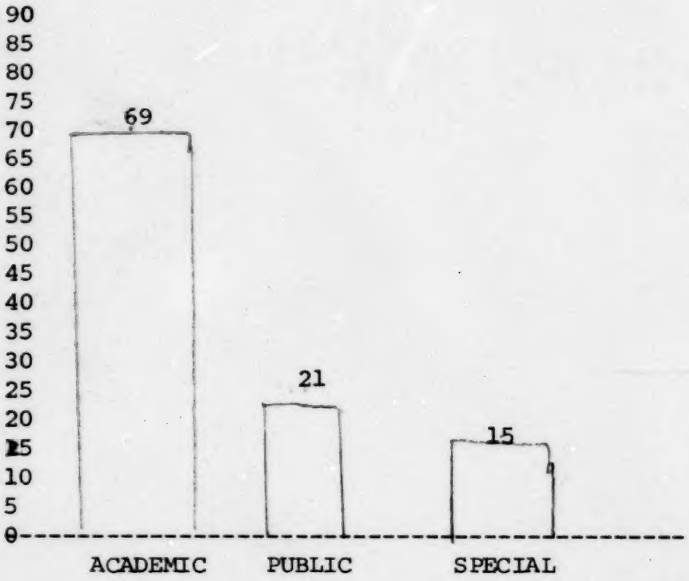
institution's interpretation of the applicant's to be an interest in the library itself or the location rather than the specific position. Though I am sure that this is undoubtedly the case in some instances, it is not always so. The first five hundred rejections reveal that 37% of the total number of responses stated that the submitted resume would be kept on file. Of the advertised: 20% of the academic, 31% of the public and 21% of the special libraries made mention of this. Of the unsolicited: 71% of the academic, 71% of the public and 42% of the special libraries stated that the resume would be kept on file.

The responses to my first five hundred enquiries for professional employment are detailed above. I leave it to the readers to draw their own conclusions. For those interested, the result of these numerous applications is that one professional position was obtained utilizing each method, the unsolicited application and the responding to advertisements.

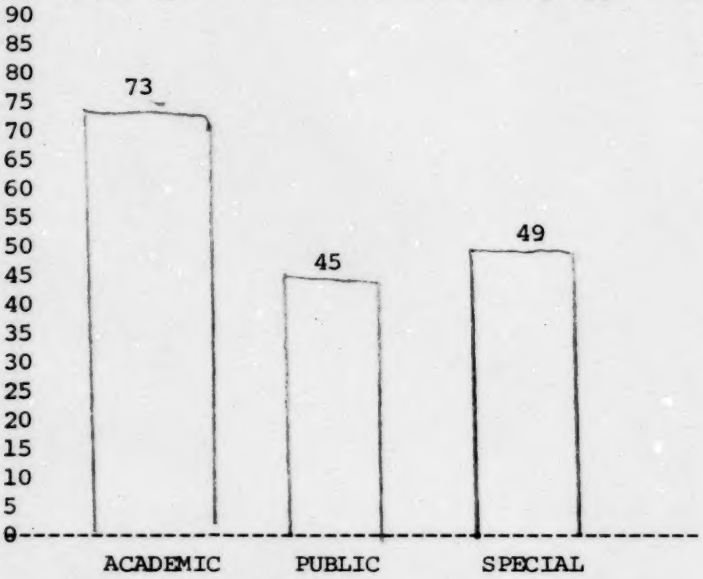
TABLES

I. The Applications

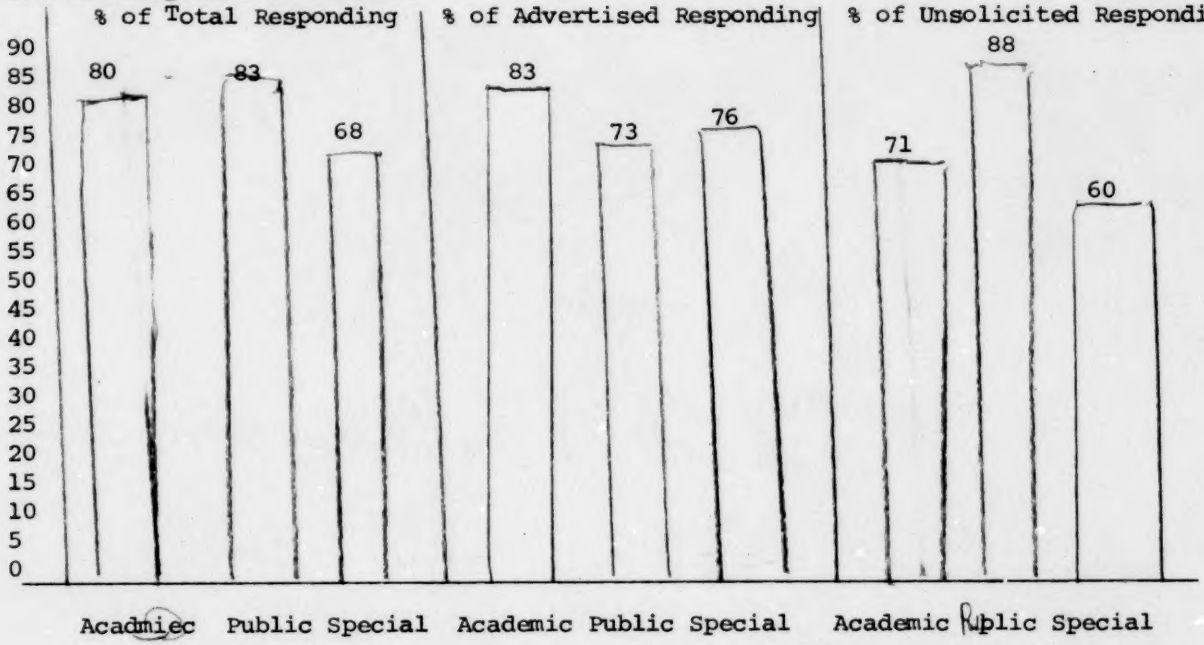
A. Percentage of Total by Type of Library



B. Percentage of Total Advertised, By Type of Library



II. The Responses In General



III. Analysis of Rejections Received: Percentage of those Rec'd

	ADVERTISED			UNSOLICITED		
	Academic	Public	Special	Academic	Public	Special
Personal Letter	36	47	42	76	92	77
Apology	19	17	0	29	22	33
Number of applicants	18	9	0	--	--	--
Individual selected	7	0	3	--	--	--
Resume on File	20	31	21	71	71	42